



Alternatives to Violence Project-Western Australia (AVP-WA)
EVALUATION OF PEACEFUL PATHWAYS (AVP-Youth)
Executive Summary

The AVP Basic, Advanced and T4F workshops, known as Peaceful Pathways (PP), were offered to selected students at Metropolitan High School (MHS) between 2007 and 2013. During that time the AVP Youth Program was an Endorsed Program with the Western Australia Standards, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Years 10, 11 and 12 in WA schools. Students who successfully completed a workshop were able to gain one point for their WACE for each level in which they participated.
http://www.scsa.wa.edu.au/internet/Senior_Secondary/Endorsed_Programs

Over the seven years that PP was running at MHS 225 students completed the Basic, 64 students completed the Advanced and 32 students were trained as facilitators. Many of these young facilitators then became team members for future workshops with other students. 34 adults associated with the school also participated in AVP workshops of whom 5 went on to train as facilitators. Another 11 external facilitators from AVP participated in workshops at the school.

An evaluation of this program was carried out in 2014. It used a qualitative dominant mixed methods approach. It had been intended to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to corroborate results through a triangulation of data, however the response rate of student participants was too low for the proposed on-line quantitative survey to be reliable. The final design mixed several qualitative methods for complementarity, i.e. the elaboration, enhancement, illustration and clarification of the results from one method with the results from another method.

Ultimately, the evaluation was primarily based on interviews with the following people.

- Seven teaching and non-teaching school staff who had completed AVP facilitator training and/or who had facilitated Peaceful Pathways workshops.
- Six teaching and non-teaching staff likely to have some knowledge of Peaceful Pathways participants, but who had not themselves participated in Peaceful Pathways workshops and were not AVP facilitators.
- Nine current students (four girls and five boys) who had completed Peaceful Pathways. All students were or had been part of the school's peer support program. Five students had completed only the basic Peaceful Pathways program; the remainder had completed the basic, advanced and facilitator training programs. Two were in Year 12, two were in Year 11 and five were in Year 10, at the time of the interviews.
- Four experienced AVP facilitators, three of whom had facilitated at least one Peaceful Pathways workshop at the school.
- The school psychologist, also a trained AVP facilitator.

From the analysis of the interview data two broad themes emerged – the way in which participation in PP impacted on individuals (themselves or others), and comments about the processes of PP, the ways in which it worked and why, and suggestions for what could be changed.



A range of positive impacts on individuals were reported by adults and students alike. These included the PP themes of conflict resolution skills, communication skills, community building, caring for others, empathy and tolerance. There were also a number of other incidental themes that emerged, namely, self-confidence, self-efficacy, a wider circle of friends, opportunities to explore leadership and to be seen as a leader, self-awareness, options and choices for decisions and actions, and PP's real world application and potential usefulness in later life.

Positive comments about PP workshop processes included the creation of an atmosphere in which participants felt welcome, the experiential learning approaches used, the fact that it was fun and active, and that there were no right or wrong answers. Experiences such as role plays, journaling and the use of the mandala were all found to be valuable. Participants also saw value in learning facilitation skills. The activities in general were seen to be meaningful and affirming and participants learnt how to give and receive feedback. Participants appreciated the development of trust and the importance placed on confidentiality. Many noted the difference in the relationship between adults and students compared to their school experiences.

Other comments made about PP included the high quality of the leaders. One or two students and adults considered it more suitable for those having problems although others recognised the importance of having a spread of different students in workshops and the AVP understanding that we all have within us the potential for violence as well as the essence of 'good' in everyone. Its limited reach within the school meant that it was hard for PP to effectively impact on the culture of the school as a whole, although it was deliberately targeted at peer support leaders and potential leaders as a means of mainstreaming it and embedding it within the school structure. The model adopted was costly in terms of time and human resources which means its capacity for transferability to other schools is questionable. Some staff, not directly involved, felt that more communication about PP with other school staff would have been helpful and would have increased support for the program.

Overall, despite the very real limitations of the study, PP seems to have made a significant and positive impact on those who had been involved, both students and staff. All who were interviewed had positive stories to relay about their experiences with PP despite the fact that it was more than 12 months since any of them had done any PP workshop and that in the majority of instances they had done only one workshop. While there were some reservations about some aspects these were limited and relatively minor. The most serious drawback identified was its cost, both in terms of time required from staff and students, and the dollar amounts incurred in replacing teaching staff when they participated. However, no matter how tempting it is to do so, these positive outcomes cannot be generalised to all students or staff who participated. Nor can it be assumed that these findings would be replicated elsewhere, although they certainly suggest that other evaluations would be worth conducting.

